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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 005002

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USTR FOR ERRION

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2013

TAGS: PREL PGOV ETRD TU SY

SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA READOUT OF SYRIAN P.M. MIRO'S VISIT TO ANKARA

(U) Classified by A/DCM Scot Marciel. Reason: 1.5 (b)(d).

¶11. (C) In a readout of Syrian P.M. Miro's July 29-30 visit to Ankara, MFA Acting Head of Department for the Middle East Kemal Tuzun told us Miro's visit was significant as the first visit of a Syrian P.M. in 17 years. As a result of the visit, Tuzun said, Turkey has invited Syrian President Assad to visit Ankara in the "near future -- perhaps by the end of the year." The Syrians have not yet responded to the Turkish invitation.

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Economic Agreements  
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¶12. (C) Tuzun claimed discussions focused on further developing bilateral economic ties, since Miro's portfolio is primarily an economic one. Miro's delegation, which included several Syrian cabinet ministers, signed agreements with the Turks on four economic and trade-related issues: 1) the formation of a Joint Economic Council; 2) health services; 3) greater customs/border cooperation; and 4) mining, petroleum and other energy related projects. The two sides agreed to work on technical agreements regarding double taxation and encouraging investment, which suffered as a result of bilateral tensions during the 1990s, when Syria actively supported the PKK. State Minister for Trade Kursad Tuzmen told the press that Turkey was interested in pursuing a free trade agreement with Syria, but Foreign Trade officials acknowledged privately that Turkey's Customs Union agreement with the EU would make an FTA difficult if not impossible. (Note: The officials said bilateral trade totaled only \$762 million in 2002. End note)

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Middle East Peace and Iraq  
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¶13. (C) On Middle East peace and Iraq, Miro offered "nothing new," according to Tuzun. Miro used the "standard Syrian talking points," saying Syria will not be an obstacle to the Road Map and claiming that "peace is now a strategic objective" for the Syrian government. Tuzun asserted that the Turks encouraged the Syrians to participate more actively in building peace and urged that Syria should use its influence to push Lebanon to do more to promote peace.

¶14. (C) Offering a different take on Miro's approach, MFA DG for the Middle East Burcuoglu claimed to Charge that Syria's position on Israel-Palestine issue has "radicalized" of late, e.g., the Syrians' statement that that Jerusalem should be the capital of a Palestinian state and Syria's support for the right of return for all Palestinian refugees.

¶15. (C) While Burcuoglu indicated to Charge that the Syrians could be a stumbling block to Arab League efforts to work with the Iraqi Governing Council, Tuzun described Miro's statements on Iraq as the "typical Syrian approach." Miro merely underscored what Syria has said before, Tuzun explained, namely that: a) Iraq must determine its own future; b) the entire region should work toward peace in Iraq; c) foreign militaries must leave Iraq at the earliest opportunity; and d) Turkey can play an important role.

DEUTSCH